

Pearl Harbor Day memories fail to fade

By Cal Turner
Patriot-News

The memories were old and painful, but the homage was heart-deep. Not even the distance of time and the chill of an ugly gray day could douse it.

It was Pearl Harbor Day, that time and hour that ranks highest on the nation's tablets of disbelief and disorder.

Approximately 100 people joined Gov. Robert P. Casey and the Pennsylvania Survivors of the Pearl Harbor Attack on the Capitol steps yesterday to touch on that time 47 years ago.

As the survivors rendered their salutes, those who did not "make it" were remembered in prayer, words and song and with the always-stirring rendition of taps. There were no frills, no verbiage, and little, if any, delay.

Casey recalled that many families were decorating a Christmas tree on Dec. 7, 1941.

"Then came the bulletin from Pearl Harbor, and for many here, it was an instant when time stood still," he said. "On that island of dreams, young men from Pennsylvania with names like Gummerson and Leslie and Brandt were dying. And within the span of just over two hours, the face of America and the world was changed forever."

The solemnity fitted the occasion as the survivors waited in the Rotunda for the ceremonies to start. Old friends greeted old friends. A slap on the back and a hug did it.

For Charles Laman Jr. of Marysville and Edison Ziemke of Mechanicsburg the occasion had a grimness they could slice and share. Both were aboard the USS Oklahoma on Pearl Harbor's Battleship Row, right aft of the Arizona. The bombs came down

around 8 a.m. on that beautiful Sunday.

Ziemke, then a 19-year-old radioman, was in dress blues, waiting to go on liberty.

"I was three decks below," he said. "Was I scared?"

"I was terrified. My instinct saved me. That instinct for survival. I crawled through a porthole. I swam away, or I tried to swim away. I ended up on the bilge keel."

"Out of a radio gang of 83, nine survived."

Laman could go on record as a Pearl Harbor survivor, and then some.

Months after the Oklahoma keeled quickly over into the mud that day, Laman was aboard the light cruiser Atlanta when it was sunk in the Solomon Islands. He was aboard the destroyer Ingraham in the spring of 1945 when a kamikaze attack put it under off the coast of Japan.

At Pearl Harbor, Laman was taking a shower when the bombs began to fall.

"I was going on liberty later on," he said. "The bombs got us right away. I didn't know what was coming off. It was dark and smoky and guys were screaming. We didn't have a chance."

"I managed to swim over to Ford Island in my shorts. I wasn't a good swimmer, but I got underwater and tried it that way, and when I'd come up, I'd push all the flame away. I was lucky."

"The Oklahoma had a crew of maybe 1,600," said Ziemke. "Around 800 were lost."

A Marysville youth and two women were members of the crews of two United States warships reportedly sunk yesterday in the Jap air attack in Hawaii, and relatives of the sailors today were anxiously awaiting official and definite details of their fate.

The trip includes Charles E. Laman, Jr., of Marysville, who was aboard the USS Oklahoma, and George F. Bancroft, Jr., of Blue Ridge Summit, nephews of Mrs. Emma Thomas, 23 Evergreen street, crew members of the U. S. S. West Virginia. Mrs. Thomas, incidentally, has a son, Priv. Harold Swope, 20, in service with the Air Corps at Nichols Field, Philippine Islands.



Charles Laman Jr., left, and Edison Ziemke pay homage



CHARLES E. LAMAN, JR.

Enlisted in November, 1939 . . . Young Laman enlisted in the United States Navy in November, 1939, his father said. He has been up for a rating as a petty officer, but his parents have not yet learned whether he has received his appointment. His father said that the youth was first sent to the Navy Training Station at Newport, R. I., and was later attached to the U. S. Bancroft, an over-age destroyer sold to Britain.

Laman was on the Bancroft, his father said, when it was sent to Nova Scotia for transfer to the British. He was then sent out to the West Coast, where he was attached to the USS Oklahoma and has been since November, 1940.